

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS WHILE VISITING BAIKONUR COSMODROME, AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS
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Perry, in Kazakhstan, Visits Long-Secret Soviet Space Site

By Steve LeVine
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BAIKONUR COSMODROME, Kazakhstan, March 20—Two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the lifting of the veil of secrecy that long surrounded its space program, a jovial Defense Secretary William J. Perry today became the first cabinet-level U.S. official to visit the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Moscow's counterpart to Cape Canaveral.

In doing so, Perry chose to focus on Baikonur's place as a potent reminder of the Cold War's demise, a place where mist wafting over icy, empty stretches makes the site appear like a nuclear disaster zone. At the same time, however, he viewed a sparkling, high-tech reminder that Moscow, although its economy and politics are in chaos, endures as a formidable challenge to Western scientific prowess.

"No place could be more appropriate to symbolize the change [in the U.S.-Russian relationship] than Baikonur," Perry said, offering a toast to Russian military officers who man the site. "This was the center of

missile development in Russia, which symbolized a race that could have ended in catastrophe for both of our countries, and indeed for the whole world. Now this symbolizes, instead of holding a fist clutched at each other, we extend a hand of friendship and cooperation."

Perry's visit came as Russia and Kazakhstan, where Baikonur is situated, are engaged in tense negotiations over Moscow's continued use of the 600-square-mile site. Many Russian officials consider Baikonur their birthright since it was mostly Russian scientists who developed the site, and it continues to be staffed almost entirely by Russian technical personnel.

Kazakhstan's government, which recently demanded \$7 billion a year in rent for the cosmodrome, now has reduced the price tag well under \$3 billion and expects to sign an agreement when President Nursultan Nazarbayev meets Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow at the end of the month, said Tokhtar Aubakirov, director of Kazakhstan's space agency.

Moscow has announced plans to build a new space pad at Ovobodny, in the Russian



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Far East, but some Western analysts view this as a negotiating ploy to pressure Kazakhstan. Western scientists say that already-impoorished Russia would have to spend more than \$250 million to build a single pad for its workhorse Proton rocket.

Although planned months ago, Perry's visit to the southwest of this vast Central Asian republic adds yet another dimension to the relatively new U.S. presence in the former Soviet Union. Washington, which until now had been finding itself increasingly in the role of teacher and financier to former Soviet republics, here met a level of Russian technical skill in many cases surpassing U.S. performance levels.

In the late 1950s, when the space age dawned on this eerie, desolate plain, the Soviets had considered the program so secret that, to confuse outsiders, they announced a site for their showcase launch pad, then stealthily built it 230 miles away, near Leninsk.

Moscow's launching of Sputnik in 1957—and four years later a Soyuz spacecraft carrying Yuri Gagarin into orbit—became graphic symbols of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War rivalry.

Now, some Russian news reports have

claimed that Baikonur is decaying. It is true that Leninsk is becoming decrepit. During the peacetime shrinking of Baikonur's workload and an economic crisis in which little hot water and electricity reach the city, almost half its population of 100,000 has left.

In addition, Moscow has abandoned what it intended as its centerpiece work for the 1990s: the Buran, a shuttle similar to the U.S. series.

But Baikonur, which has conducted more than twice the 453 space launches that Canaveral has handled since 1957, is entering the Western commercial world. Next year, it is to launch an Inmarsat communications satellite, and the following year 21 low-station communication satellites are scheduled to lift off from Baikonur as part of a Motorola project to establish a global cellular telephone system.

Bob Clarke, a NASA administrator who accompanied Perry, noted that ground crews for Soyuz manned flights can prepare the pad for a new launch only six hours after one capsule takes off; the Cape Canaveral turn-around time is one month. "Their performance is world class," he said.

Adm. William Owens, vice chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, marveled at the workmanship on a Soyuz rocket being readied for launch Monday.

"See those welds?" he said, gazing over an iron railing surrounding the 150-foot-tall rocket.

"Where it isn't important, the Russians trash it. But when it counts, at pressure points—those welds—they are superb. They can't be equaled."